

CREATING COMMUNITY

AVP Miami-style

In this issue, a series of articles by inmate facilitators of AVP Miami reflect Community Building as our theme. We appreciate this great opportunity to also share two activities that are currently complementing our work; keeping the community together in between AVP weekends in a very significant way.

One of these is a **series of dialogue sessions conducted by facilitators** at Everglades Correctional Institution, as well as by other inmates trained on how to lead dialogue sessions. For eight years, facilitators and participants have been meeting every Tuesday for one hour, to share around different structured topics. Aimed to contribute to the rehabilitation process, these topics are carefully

selected by inside facilitators to meet the specific needs of participants. The purpose of these dialogues is to build community among the current population. For these sessions, two of the AVP exercises, Gathering and Concentric Circles, work with excellent results. (See Box for Agenda.) Complementing our A.V.P workshops, inside facilitators have been challenged, as well, to stretch beyond their usual role of AVP facilitator to: develop meaningful discussion topics, write new dialogue content, create new group exercises, and translate these materials into Spanish.



EVERGLADES C.I. - 1998
Photo Submitted by Mitchell Brown

The **annual holiday community-building event** is another successful activity held in December at each institution for participants who have completed a Basic workshop. For many of the 60-80 participants, this AVP mini-session is their only holiday celebration as they have no visitors.

Due to high demand, an inmate can wait a year to take an AVP workshop. Lack of outside volunteers and limited availability of institutional staff for weekend programs make it difficult to keep up with this demand. The harsh realities of life on the inside continually put transforming power to the test. With these activities we have served to support community building and the overall sustainability of the transformative process.

Diligent Dawn - AVP Miami

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Sample Dialogue Agenda

Responsibility (Topic of the week)

Intro and Gathering: I am ____ and one time recently I was responsible was:

Circles of Understanding

1. Being responsible means to me ____ and it is important, because _____
2. How does it feel to take on responsibility?
3. Do you find any value in being responsible?
4. How do we know when we meet a responsible person?
5. What are some characteristics of being responsible?
6. How does being responsible affect others?

Small Group Discussion

1. Is it possible to take on too much responsibility and what is the downside of doing that?
2. How is being responsible part of self-respect and respecting others?

Miami AVP



REMEMBERING THE 2007 NATIONAL GATHERING IN FLORIDA - THE AVP FAMILY TREE

ARTICLES FROM THE EVERGLADES

PATH TO A STRONGER COMMUNITY

By Balanced Bob Bruno

Communities come in all shapes, sizes and forms--whether it is a local residential community, a community in a workplace or a prison community. My perspective comes from living in the latter. For those who may be familiar with the issues and dynamics of living a life of incarceration, the principles of positive interaction, common courtesy, good communication and non-violent conflict resolution can be applied in any community—incarcerated or not. For those who, like me, are leading a life that is strictly governed by authority figures every hour of every day, this environment can become overwhelming and very stressful.

Alternatives to Violence Project programs greatly contribute to an individual's sense of worth and self esteem in this context. When we are able to foster improvement and growth in areas such as peaceable conflict resolution and constructive/productive self-evaluation, the entire population of our community benefits. Along these lines, any time you enable the peaceable members of any

group to elect to participate in social interaction that will spread positive attributes and values, everyone in the community wins. Eventually, the interaction of the positively motivated group with the masses of others will allow the proactive, positive skills to be acknowledged, learned and passed along.

This project is an excellent vehicle to allow any group of individuals who are willing to strive for productivity and a positive value system to effectively pass along the skills and ideas explored in the exercise groups to others in their community. This also will generate more interest in AVP and entice more individuals to attend the workshops.

An AVP setting is effective in influencing the greater community as a whole to transform themselves, as individuals, into better persons living, interacting and co-existing in a better place.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

By Manageable Mitchell Brown

I have been in the AVP-Miami community since 1996. When I think about community and facilitation, the word Dharma comes to mind. Dharma is a Sanskrit word that means “purpose in life.” One component of Dharma is service to humanity –to serve your fellow human beings and

to ask yourself the questions: “How can I help?”, “How can I help all those I come into contact with?”

When you combine the ability to express your unique talent with service to humanity, then you make full use of the law of Dharma. And coupled with the experience of your own spirituality, the field of pure potentiality, there is no way you will not have access to unlimited abundance because that is the real way abundance is achieved. Thus, Community Building can be realized.

This is not a temporary abundance; it’s permanent--because of your unique talent, your way of expressing it and your service and dedication to your fellow human beings, which you discover through asking the question, “How can I help?” instead of “What’s in it for me?”

The question, “What’s in it for me?” is the internal dialogue of the ego. Asking, “How can I help?” is the internal dialogue of the spirit. The spirit is the domain of your awareness where you experience your universality. Thus, facilitation can be realized.

In just shifting your internal dialogue from “What’s in it for me?” to “How can I help?”, you automatically go beyond the ego in the domain of your spirit.

SKILLS THAT BUILD COMMUNITY

Rejuvenating Richard McMillian starts off: I have been an AVP facilitator for four years, and I simply love it. The tools for problem solving are very useful and an excellent way to start building a community. AVP is not only a program that teaches us how to handle our problems in a more positive manner; it also teaches us how to help others that may have problems in their lives.

Detractor to contributor

Lyle Roberts reveals: I feel it mostly comes down to being open just enough to allow yourself to learn and recognize the skills necessary to become a socially responsible and productive citizen. It has become clear to me that prior to my incarceration, my social and community- building skills were in too many ways impaired and ineffective. Subsequently, during these 25 years of incarceration, reinforcement of these impaired skills was to be expected –unless opportunities arose whereby new ways are introduced. By awakening to the possibilities and importance of social networking, teamwork and the skills necessary for their development, AVP, has helped to rebuild my self-esteem and energizes me to be a contributor instead of a detractor.

Communication plus...

Agreeable Alejandro Hoyas offers: Taking all three levels of the AVP workshops helped me to find the best ways to resolve any conflict I may encounter in a non-violent resolution. I learned what caring is about, and I found what is good in others and myself. Now, after taking the final level of the facilitator training, I will be able to help others with cooperation exercises as well as with building communities by showing others how to trust and respect. One of the best things I got from AVP is the improvement of my communication skills, which was something I had always lacked. Today, I can speak with more clarity and confidence in a relaxed way.

Giving as Community Building

Respectful Robert Fitts contributes: As an apprentice AVP facilitator, Community Building through AVP showed me that our differences—whether physical, mental, cultural, or religious--can be an important asset or building block in a community as long as the community is based on respect, honesty, and caring. Because of the AVP workshops, I am now aware that receiving is really giving, giving is Transforming Power and Transforming Power is, in turn, receiving. It is a cycle that never ends!!

Transforming Power

Trustworthy Tariq (Lonnie Williams)

writes: Being awakened to Transforming Power, I came to realize that by activating this power we become proactive in our lives instead of reactive. What I mean by proactive is that we take control of our own actions in situations we encounter in life, and by doing so we help the other party to look within him/herself to re-evaluate the situation and help seek a non-violent solution. The concept of a win-win solution really intrigues me because everyone loves to win, and I am no different. And if both of us can win, then I am definitely all for it.

Breakthrough Sherman Doughtry shares: “Breakthrough” means to be able to come out of anything that’s holding on in a positive way, with the help of AVP and the understanding of Transforming Power. I can say, truly, that since being a facilitator, I stand strong with my positive name for myself and for everyone else because it brings about hope. Also, I found it to be helpful to others as well.

Adjective Names

Richie Rich Lechler encourages: As a lead AVP facilitator building a better community, I have seen some very encouraging transformation during our workshops. Starting with adjective names, the guys can see the bond beginning. As we do things like Brainstorming Exercises, Octopus, Noah’s Ark, Light & Livelies, Big

Wind Blows and Pattern Balls, we see men come together in a joyful, peaceful and respectful way. They grow in patience and understand that as a group we can work together to make prison a better place. Now, as we see each other on the compound and use our adjective names, we know we are part of this special AVP community.

Joyful Jonathan Cantero summarizes: During the three years I have been involved in AVP, I have watched the community of participants and team members evolve into something special. Our community is one of affirming, cooperation, and the development of social skills. Men who had never socialized or no sense of fun or spontaneity have come out of these workshops with smiles on their faces and openness to their spirits. Seeing these guys with a newly instilled sense of hope and knowing that our facilitation of the process helped foster that change encourages my co-facilitators and me to work even harder on the next workshop.

Finally, AVP and the community that has blossomed from the diligent facilitation of its process have provided me with a support system, which I previously lacked. Also, AVP has helped me to overcome my shyness and opened up a brand new world of people whom I trust and depend on. I am privileged to be part

of a community striving to enrich the lives of our fellow men.

DO YOU CONFRONT A KILLER, OR DO YOU APPEASE HIM?

By Jammin' Joe (Joseph Ciambrone)

Some would prefer to run in the opposite direction and put as much distance between them as possible. That's a normal reaction. However, in the prison system, one can run only as far as the perimeter fences and ultimately be forced to face the predator.

Some people may choose to hide in protective custody. Yet, even returning to the compound or being transferred to another prison, they will once again be forced to face another nemesis of sorts. For the entire prison system is full of violent habitual felons who enjoy the reactions to the fear they thrust in the hearts of others.

How does this relate to community building? Why would anyone want to associate with violent felons, let alone befriend one? It is because society does not always have a "personal select" feature. Inmates are forced to dwell with and work among people with a myriad of social, aptitude, and emotional dysfunctions. Confrontations always lead to pain, usually with bloodshed. And appeasement only leads to more aggressive behavior because the predator thrives on the taste of blood

and fear. Then the victims emotionally deteriorate, beyond hope, or they learn to develop a way to overcome fear and the possibility of brutality.

The Alternative to Violence Project has become a useful source for the men in Everglades Correctional Institution, Miami, Florida, to develop the interpersonal skills so necessary to function and survive in a hostile world. Just knowing the needs and desires of those around you helps prepare you to begin to build a road into relationship.

Most prisoners think of relationship as a one-way ticket for them to get what they want. Relationship means there must be a bonding of some sort between people. Many children who were abandoned, neglected, or abused

in their formative years could have been severely damaged emotionally and unable to bond. Being a mentor in AVP affords us an assortment of tools to redirect and transform negative power. This is where a strong foundation is set as we begin to build a superstructure that can support a community of broken folks, giving and sharing of themselves for the good of our society. Brick by brick we build. Sometimes a bit of chiseling is required to assure a fine fit. This is accomplished by recognizing the needs of others, having self respect, expecting the best in each other, trusting and asking for a positive non-violent solution. Most of this is done through genuine dialogue, positive actions and compassion. Most of all, we must trust the process. It works!!

“It’s a Cocktail Party!”a Light –N- Lively

By Joyful Jonathan Cantero

This L&L can be used at any time during a workshop, but at Everglades Correctional Institution we use it most often during a break when the participants can mingle and have refreshments. *(continued on page 10) →*



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AVP-L2 LIST ACCESS

("Cocktail Party" continued from page 7)

The team should prepare pieces of paper (4"x4") so that there is one for each participant and team member. Next, select a theme. Some examples are: sports figures (teams), historical figures, great American animals, etc. Once the theme is chosen, write down names which represent that theme (see examples below). You will need one name for each person participating. Write a name on each piece of paper and put a piece of tape on each one also.

Explain to everyone that when they get up to get their refreshments, you will be taping a piece of paper to their backs. The goal is to discover what the name is on the paper without looking. Everyone will have to walk around and let people look at the paper, but they may not ask directly what the name is. The only questions they can ask are yes/no questions. This is a fun way to encourage interactions.

Examples:

Sports Figures	Great Americans	Historical Figures	Animals
Joe Montana	Martin Luther King	William Shakespeare	Elephant
Walter Payton	Abraham Lincoln	Julius Caesar	Siberian Tiger
Magic Johnson	Albert Einstein	Leonardo DaVinci	Golden Labrador
Michael Jordan	Rosa Parks	Langston Hughes	Ostrich
Barry Bonds	Maya Angelou	Alexander the Great	Parakeet
Babe Ruth	George Washington	Christopher Columbus	Opossum

"Let's Take a Walk"

By Jonathan Cantero

Purpose: To think about how the person we once were has led us to become the person we are today and to imagine the person we will become.

Time: 45 Minutes

Materials: 5 sheets of 8 1/2" x 11" paper and 1 marker per participant

Sequence: Distribute 5 sheets of paper and 1 marker to each participant.

Part One

1. Explain the purpose of the exercise: "We will be examining our lives by looking back to who we were, looking at who we are now and looking forward to who we will become."

2. Explain how we will accomplish this: “We will do this by creating stepping stones which guide us in our reflections and lead us to who we will become.”
3. Ask everyone to write “I once was” at the top of the first page and to write the same thing at the top of the second page. Now, ask everyone to think of two words that describe who you once were and to write those words on the first sheet of paper. Once everyone is done, ask them to think of two more words that describe who you once were and to write those words on the second sheet of paper.
4. Ask everyone to write “I am now” at the top of the third page and to write the same thing at the top of the fourth page. Now ask everyone to think of two words that describe who you are now and to write those words on the third sheet of paper. Once everyone is done, ask them to think of two more words that describe who you are now and to write those words on the fourth sheet of paper.
5. Ask everyone to write “I will be ”at the top of the fifth page. Now ask them to think of four words that describe who you will be and to write those words on the fifth sheet of paper.

Part Two

1. Ask everyone to stand up and put the first stepping stone, “I once was,” on the floor about a foot in front of them. Explain that we will all step on the first stepping stone as a group and that as we do so, we will say to ourselves what we have written.
2. After everyone has stepped forward, tell them to put the second stepping stone, “I once was,” on the floor so that it touches the first. Tell them to step on this one also and say to yourself what you have written.
3. Ask everyone to close your eyes as they reflect on this person they once were. At this point you may ask one or two questions that are in keeping with the theme of the session. For example, “How did this person handle conflicts?”; “Were you satisfied with the results?”
4. Tell everyone to open your eyes. Ask them to put the third stepping stone, “I am now,” on the floor about a foot in front of you. When everyone is ready, tell them to step on it and say to themselves what they have written on it.
5. After everyone has stepped forward, tell them to put the fourth stepping

stone, “I am now,” on the floor so that it touches the third one. Tell them to step on this one also and say to yourself what you have written on it.

6. Ask everyone to close your eyes as they reflect on the person you are now. You may ask one or two questions as before or use silence.

7. Tell everyone to open your eyes. Ask them to put the last stepping stone, “I will be,” on the floor about a foot in front of you. Explain that we will be stepping on the stepping stones one at a time, starting with the team member and proceeding to right. Also explain that as you step on the stone, say in a loud and affirmative voice what you have written on it. By doing this we form a covenant with ourselves to become this person.

8. When everyone is standing on the last stepping stone, ask them to close your eyes. Say, “You are now the person you have always wanted to be. How is this person different from who you once were? How is he the same? Take a moment to imagine what your life will be like now.” You may add one or two questions appropriate to the theme of the session. As always, pause after each statement/question to give them time to visualize what it means to them.

9. Ask everyone to open your eyes and look around the circle. Point out that the circle has closed up as well as all moved towards the center. Also, this process has brought us physically closer together and, hopefully, as a community.

10. Have everyone return to their seats in the circle, leaving the stepping stones on the floor during the debriefing.

RESEARCH: IMPACT OF AVP

(graphs were modified to conserve space, see note on page 16)*

Participants' perceptions of the impact of AVP on their rehabilitation, a female Correctional Institution in Florida

By Patricia Gomez

As an A.V.P. facilitator, I have experienced the Transforming Power in my life. During my first workshops, I had the opportunity to participate in activities and exercises that definitely changed my perspectives about me, others, and my relationships. Later on, I realized that nothing can be compared to the

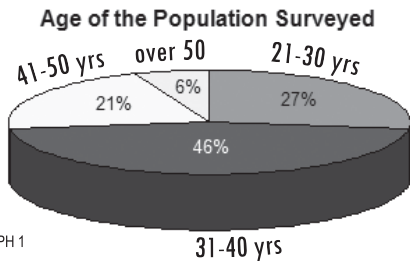
experience of being an outside AVP facilitator. Today, I can affirm that being a facilitator is an integral part of my own identity and has become little by little an integral part of who I am.

While I was co-facilitating sessions, I felt the need for knowing how participants perceived the program, what exercises they would prefer and how the program was helping them in their rehabilitation process. I decided to create an evaluation intended to capture those perceptions. The evaluation created consisted of fifteen questions from which 4 were closed and 11 were open. A total of

35 inmates completed the questionnaire in a facility that houses minimum, medium and close custody prisoners. Some of those 35 inmates participated in the Basic and some in the Advance workshop.

I. Demographic information of the participants

As the **Graph # 1** shows, almost half of the total number of participants in the workshop (46%) are between the ages of 31 and 40 years old, followed by a 27% between the ages of 21 and 30 years old. 21% of the participants are between the ages of 51 and 50 and only 6% were over 50. 84% of the participants have been in prison from 0 to 5 years, 13% from 6 to 10 years and only 3% for more than 10 years. 62.5% of the participants have a sentence of less than 12 years, 25% of 12 years or more, and 12.5% have a life sentence.



GRAPH 1

This demographic information is important in terms of the effects of rehabilitation programs, -such as A.V.P- on inmates. Research shows, for example, that “one thing that does correlate positively with a reduction in criminal activity is increasing age; people under age thirty-five commit most crimes. Therefore, it could be argued that sentences that keep offenders in prison until middle age will reduce overall crime rates.”(Kang, 2007, p. 1). According to a study published by The Florida Department of Corrections in July, 2003, “For both males

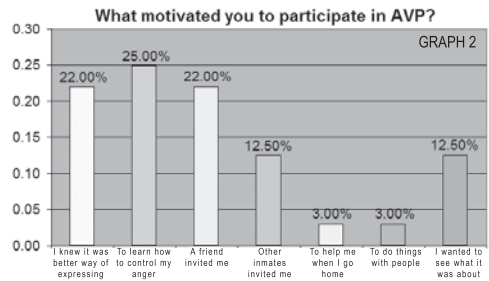
and females, the two most influential factors on re-offending and re-imprisonment are prior recidivism and age at release, in that order.”

The fact that 73% of the participants of this sample were over 31 years old means that the program is contributing with the rehabilitation process of a population that seems to benefit from these interventions.

II. Participants’ perceptions of the program

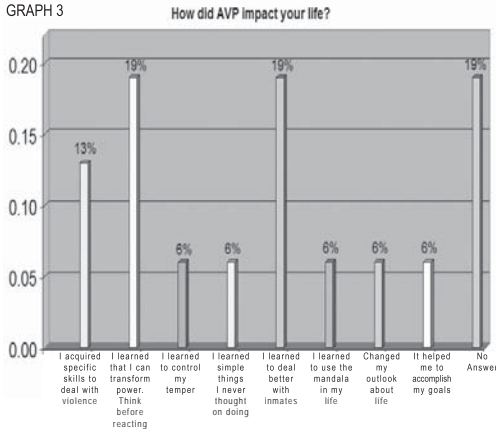
The first of the open questions formulated to the participants was: what motivated you to participate in A.V.P? As **Graph # 2** shows, 25% affirmed that the main purpose for participating in the program was “to learn how to control their anger”, followed by 22% who indicated that “they knew that the program was going to provided them with a better way of expressing themselves” and another 22% who affirmed that they were invited by a friend. Only 12.5% indicated that they came out of curiosity.

Taking into consideration that in the year of 2005, there were “over 126,022 acts of violent crimes in the state of Florida that included murder, forcible sex, robbery, and aggravated assault” (Gateless Gate, 2006), these percentages are considerably important. The fact that inmates recognize their own anger and are interested in participating in programs



GRAPH 2

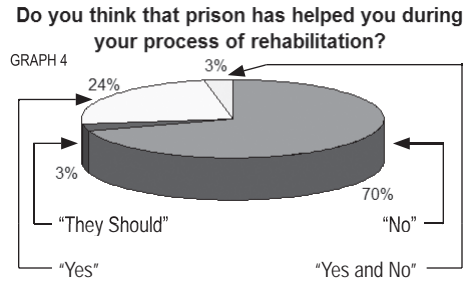
intended to help them to deal with it is a good indicator. On the other hand, inmates seem to recognize their need for communication skills, since 22% of the participants surveyed indicated that they wanted to “learn new ways of expressing themselves.” This shows a need for learning communication skills among the population.



Graph # 3 shows how more than 50% of the participants that previously participated in AVP workshops perceived that it has impacted their lives in areas such as relationships and violence management. 19% specified that the program helped them to “think before reacting”, which is one of the components of the program. Taking into account that the Advance workshop took place months after the Basic workshop in which this group participated. This is a significant accomplishment. The time between workshops would allow participants to put into practice the skills they had the opportunity to practice in the basic workshop. This coincides with a study published by Christine Walrath, from Johns Hopkins University, in July, 2001, in which the results

showed that AVP had a positive impact on participants. According to this study, “not only did the levels of expressed/experienced anger decrease as a function of participation in the AVP intervention, but as expected, for those individuals who did not participate in AVP, levels of anger increased over time.” (p.13)

70% of the participants perceive that the



correctional institution has not helped them during their rehabilitation process. Only 24% affirmed that the institution has helped them. For the same question, 42% of the inmates went beyond and provided more information. 36% of the inmates surveyed affirmed that only volunteers and other programs (such as church) offered in the facility have helped them, and 6% affirmed that the institution does not allow them to participate in the programs.

Conclusions

These two last graphs [3 & 4] show a reality that is reflected in the high recidivism rates that continue increasing every day: prison seems not to be the solution for crime. It is not only perceived by the inmates participating in this survey. It is a reality that is affecting society. The costs of prison are quantifiable and non quantifiable. “Florida spends each year in excess of \$60 millions for its states correctional system” (Online Sunshine, 2007),

and these costs seem not to be compensated by a decrease in crime. Contrary to what should be expected, the recidivism rates continue increasing. A report published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics in 1994, indicates that “among nearly 300,000 prisoners released in 15 states in 1994, 67.5% were rearrested within 3 years.”

If prison has proved not to be the solution for the problem, it is time to find new solutions that could have a positive impact on the rehabilitation processes of inmates. Alternative programs offered by outside agencies and institutions seem to have a positive effect on inmates. If it is well known that high educational levels are positively related to recidivism, the allocation of more resources to this aspect is essential. According to a report published by the Florida Department of Corrections, “for males, the last tested education grade level is the third most influential factor on re-offending and re-imprisonment.” Another study shows that “the imprisonment of over half the nation’s inmates can be directly linked to functional illiteracy, equating to a cost of \$6.6 billion yearly” (Langley, 1999).

Although education is an important variable in the rehabilitation process of inmates, it has to be complemented with programs intended to help them to improve their life skills. According to Langley (1999), “to help deal with the unique problems facing the prison population, education is becoming focused on life and survival skills. Classes in anger management, effective communication skills, and parenting are being implemented in

prisons throughout the country. These classes will help ensure that once released, prisoners will have the tools necessary to function effectively in today’s society. This proves that the existence of programs such as AVP is extremely necessary to fulfill a need that cannot be satisfied only by formal education. Inmates constitute a population with special needs and those need have to be met. If that is not understood, we will never solve the high rates of crime and recidivism we witness today.

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- 1** *Creating Community*
AVP Miami-style
- 3** *Path to a Stronger Community*
- 3** *Community Building*
- 4** *Skills that Build Community*
- 6** *Do You Confront a Killer, or Do
 You Appease Him?*

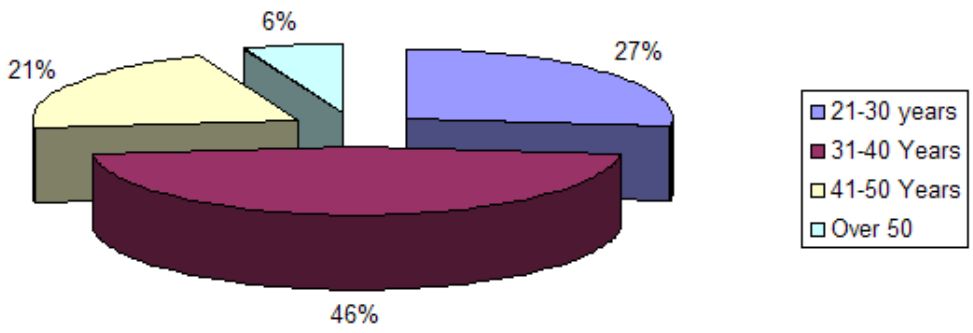
- 7** *L&L: It's a Cocktail Party!*
- 10** *Exercise: Let's Take a Walk*
- 12** *Research: Impact of AVP*

ERRATA / SUMMER 2007: "Falling in Love at the National Conference" on page 15 was by Kaki Sjogren.

Original Color Graphs from "RESEARCH: Impact of AVP," the Transformer, Fall 2007:
(In the Fall issue, graphs were modified to conserve space)

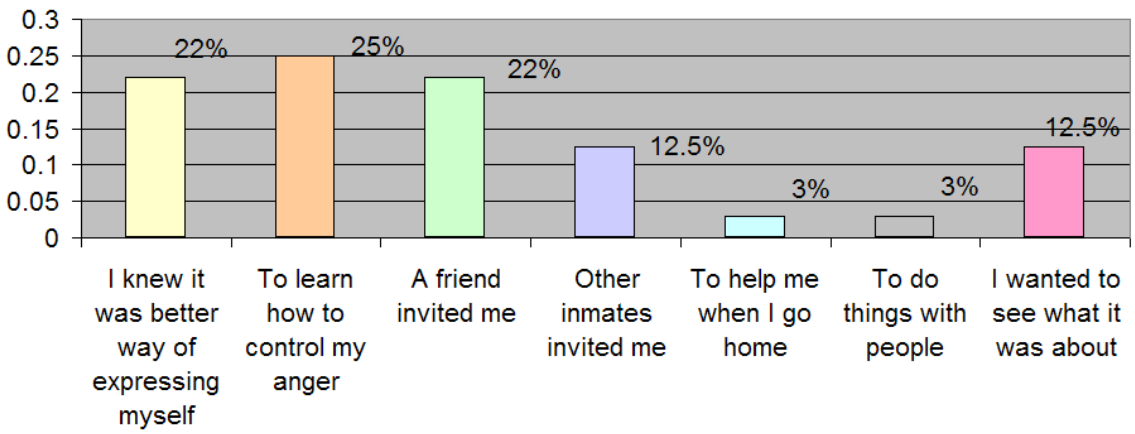
GRAPH 1

Age of the Population Surveyed



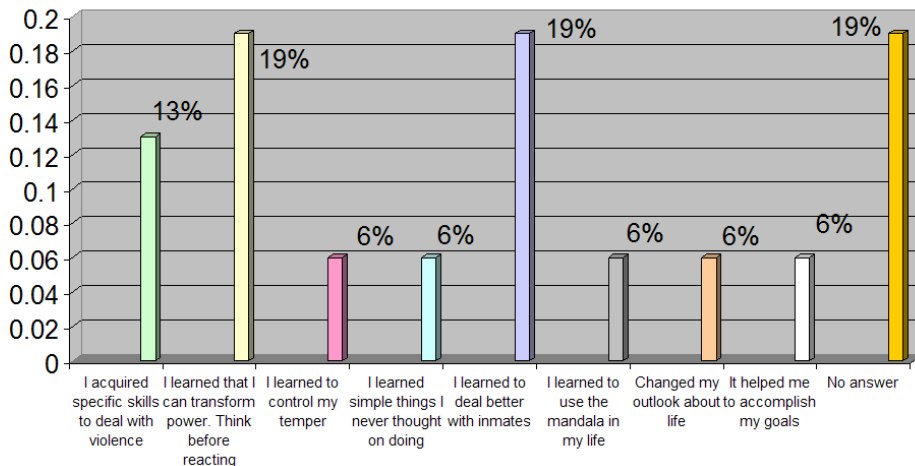
GRAPH 2

What motivated you to participate in AVP?



GRAPH 3

How did AVP impact your life?



GRAPH 4

Do you think that prison has helped you during your process of rehabilitation?

